

December 1955

Volume 34

Number 403

# ***LABOUR ORGANISER***

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## Situations Vacant

**BELPER C.L.P.**—Applications are invited for the post of full-time Secretary/Agent. Salary and conditions in accordance with the National Agreement. Application Forms can be obtained from Mr. A. W. Hill, 119 Green Lane, Derby, to whom they should be returned not later than first post on the 17th December, 1955.

**WESTBURY (WILTS) C.L.P.**—Wanted, Secretary/Agent. House, car, office and staff available. Salary and conditions as National Agreement. Application forms from H. Arkwright (L.O.) Trades and Labour Club, Trowbridge, Wilts. Closing date for return, 31st December, 1955.

**REIGATE C.L.P.**—The closing date for receipt of applications for the post of full-time Secretary/Agent has been extended. Salary and conditions in accordance with National Agreement. Car available. Application forms obtainable from Mr. R. N. Bottini, 77 Ockley Mead, Godstone, Surrey. All completed application forms must be returned to Mr. Bottini not later than the 31st December, 1955.

**WOOLWICH WEST C.L.P.**—Applications are invited for the post of Agent for this marginal constituency, such Officer to act also as Assistant Secretary of the Woolwich Labour Party. Salary in accordance with the National scale. Full-time clerical assistance is provided. Application forms, **which must be returned not later than 31st December, 1955,** are obtainable from Mr. J. S. Keys, Secretary, Woolwich Labour Party, 3 Woolwich New Road, London, S.E.18.

**BIRMINGHAM BOROUGH LABOUR PARTY** require an Assistant Organiser to work under the direction of the Borough Party Secretary. Salary and conditions in accordance with the National Agreement. Application forms from **Mr. J. H. Nash, 25a Paradise Street, Birmingham 1,** to whom they must be returned not later than 31st December, 1955.

The columns of the *Labour Organiser* are open to anyone with something interesting and informative to say on those specific subjects in which the magazine deals.

Many readers may not realise that the new idea which they have conceived and put into successful practice will most likely be of value to their counterparts in other places. Therefore, if you have developed something new, either on an old problem or a new one, write it up and let the rest of the Labour movement have the benefit of your knowledge.

Don't forget the deadline for the receipt of all contributions is the 15th of the month for publication the following month.

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# THE LABOUR ORGANISER

EDITOR: A. L. WILLIAMS

PUBLISHED BY THE LABOUR PARTY, TRANSPORT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.1

VOL. 34. NO. 403

DECEMBER, 1955

PRICE FIVEPENCE

## A New Beginning For Labour Youth

**F**EW subjects arouse sentiment at Labour Party meetings as easily as Youth organisations. However, good organisation requires activity based on facts rather than sentiment.

The Labour Party has realistically decided to face the facts about the League of Youth. Having found that the League was not fulfilling its purpose, the 1955 Annual Conference, on the advice of the National Executive Committee, decided to dismantle the national regional and area machinery of the League, and to transform League branches into Youth Sections of constituency and local parties.

Since the war, considerable efforts have been made to build up the Labour League of Youth. From 1948 onwards, national and regional machinery for the League has been developed. Considerable sums of money were spent each year by the National Executive Committee on behalf of the League.

### Concessions Made

Numerous concessions which have been made towards meeting the wishes of the League have resulted in a considerable expansion in the scope of League of

Youth National Conferences. Unfortunately, as the powers of National League of Youth Conferences grew, the number of delegates attending fell.

At the 1951 conference there were 349 delegates present. The following year attendance fell to 190, and by 1954 it had dropped to 121.

The 1955 conference had to be abandoned, because well after the final date for nominating delegates, only 54 had been appointed. The decision to abandon the conference was taken on the advice of the National Consultative Committee of the League.

### Conference Resolutions

If the 1955 conference had been held, it would have been possible for delegates to have discussed resolutions on such burning topics as 'Colonial policy' and 'The need for, and the effect of, conscription'.

The National Consultative Committee consisted of 22 members, and was made up of two representatives from each of the Labour Party regions. In March of this year, there were two vacancies on the Committee, one of which had not been filled for a long period owing to the inability of the region concerned to find

a League member willing and able to serve. The second vacancy had been caused by the resignation of one of the members because his branch had become defunct.

Four members of the Committee came from League branches which were believed to be dormant. Two members had joined branches other than their original branches, because these had become defunct. Four other members came from branches each of which had not more than six active members.

The regional machinery of the League had broken down. In some regions it had not been possible to hold Annual Youth Conferences because of lack of interest by League branches. In some cases, Regional Youth Advisory Committees had not functioned properly for many months.

The federations of the League of Youth were in practise organised and controlled entirely by representatives of League branches. In 1950 there were 58 federations recorded at Head Office. By 1955 this number had fallen to 14, and some of these were extremely small, consisting of only a very few branches.

## Numbers Fall

Probably the best method of appraising the measure of success achieved by the League is to examine the development of League branches. It is, after all, branches in which members are organised, and not in national or regional machinery. In November, 1950, there were 820 League branches. By the autumn of 1955, there were only just over 200 recorded at Head Office. The average number of members in these branches had also fallen.

While these facts are not pleasant, it must be remembered that the story of the League of Youth since the war has not been one of a complete failure. Some very good League of Youth branches have flourished over a considerable period, and many new active members have been brought into the Labour Party through the League.

In addition to these achievements, it has been possible to establish a number of facts about Labour Party youth organisations: There is no doubt that there is need for a Labour Party Youth organisation at local level; activities must include those of an educational and social

nature; and there must be the closest liaison with local Labour parties.

## Machinery Fails

The failure of the national and regional machinery of the League shows that a separate organisational superstructure is not required. In the past, the effect of having separate machinery for the League has largely been to drain off branch leadership, and so assist in weakening many good branches.

It is quite definite that in future Labour Party Youth Sections will require more help from local parties than League branches have received in the past. It has also been established that there must be a continuous drive by the Labour Party to interest young people in its policies.

A turning point has now been reached in the organisation of youth in the Labour Party. The National Executive Committee has established a Youth Sub-Committee to give continuous attention to this problem at national level. In a future issue of the *Labour Organiser* I hope to outline the plans of the National Executive Committee for developing a really effective Labour Party youth organisation.

K. PEAY

## Party Accounts

MAY I, as treasurer of the Brierley Hill Constituency Labour Party, congratulate you on the publication of 'Accounts . . . as at 31st December'. Might I suggest that a very useful sequel to this would be an article dealing with 'How to keep the Party accounts'. I know the section in Party Organisation, but this could be improved upon.

In fact, I think Head Office might well produce a small handbook for treasurers and other Party officials.

Ken Russell

We hope to have the further article suggested by Mr. Russell in our next issue and will consider the possibility of a small handbook on keeping Party accounts.

Editor

## QUAIR'S PAGE

AMONG the difficulties that have handicapped the Labour Party in recent years has been an unusual difficulty of propaganda. In the political field there has been no single question on which the parties have been in violent conflict that created a burning interest among the electors, and no efforts succeeded in generating such an interest.

Because of this difficulty a lot of propaganda has been left undone, and much of what has been done has not been very well done. Our thwarted pugnacity has consequently turned inwards and we have spent a lot of time getting angry with one another. Now a good healthy family row, now and then, may not be altogether a bad thing, but perpetual nagging is worse than constant dripping.

THE Autumn Budget has presented us with an unrivalled opportunity for vigorous and pungent propaganda, and the fortunes of the Party in the coming months will turn largely on our acumen in making the most of the occasion.

We must guard against being too profound. Propaganda to ten million homes must be in one-syllable words. We shall fail in the more solid work of education unless we have first caught the eye and the ear of the millions, the millions who don't listen to the Third Programme.

TIME is of vital importance. On Friday, October 28th, every housewife in the country was boiling with wrath at the imminent increase in price of her pots and pans and kettles, her brooms and brushes and baskets, and a host of other necessities of use and wear. Hot anger does not last, and to-day, five or six weeks later, she is not so furious as she was when the Budget news first burst upon her. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury helpfully reminded us that the housewife does not have to buy household ironmongery every week. That is true. Women buy these things when they have to. Old Mother Brown's saucepan may not give notice until next March. Then she will buy another. By that time the effects of the Budget will have passed into the established order of things, and Mrs.

# A Vital Hour has Struck

Brown will not remember that she is coughing up an extra eightpence *unless we remind her of it then.*

Thus our propaganda, to succeed, must be sustained, carefully planned and spread over months to come. It must be simple, and confined to practical matters of pence and shillings. The chap who has some dim notion of 'permutations' as he sweats at his coupon, but can't help his nipper to extract a square-root for his homework, is not likely to be easily interested in the balance of payments crisis. We may not get much of his attention over the horrors of nuclear war, but he will surely be capable of indignation over having to pay an extra two bob for a new pair of working trousers. Similarly, a few weeks hence it will be a far, far better thing to show him just why his rent has gone up than to give him a migraine by trying to expound the theory of value to him.

Our urgent task, therefore, is to carry simple and pointed propaganda, based primarily on the Budget, into millions of homes. It can be done by highly-organised doorstep work strengthened by attractive and brief printed matter. Such propaganda must precede more serious efforts for political education. It must precede extension of organisation. It may be made the basis of our drive for that second million membership.

IF our local Executive listens to me, as it doesn't always do (more's the pity), the ward I told you of last month will be given a going-over the like of which it has never known before. And there won't be much loss if that 'municipal question box' is thrown on the municipal tip.

Here, anyhow, is a serious proposal for a steady planned campaign gathering strength week by week and adapted to the developing situation, running right on to the start of the battle for the local Council seats. What about it?

# BE PRACTICAL ON POLLING DAY

by H. R. Underhill

THE circulation of the memorandum on the operation of the Reading procedure and Mr. Mikardo's *Organiser* articles have aroused renewed consideration of polling day systems. I think it is highly important that there should be recognition of the defects in a particular system as well as appreciation of its advantages.

Let us look at some of these systems.

★ ★ ★

**THE 'READING SYSTEM'.** I like the main features of this system. It economises on the number of workers required in committee rooms, for there is only one job of marking-off to be performed. The 'knocking-up' list, being also the main record of our promises who have voted, must always be up-to-date; this is a feature which many other systems fail to achieve.

There is also no need for the 'knocking-up' list to be returned to the committee rooms, it may be destroyed after use, for a new list is used for subsequent 'knocking-up'.

There are, however, two major snags which cannot be glossed over. Firstly, the typed lists cannot be prepared until the canvass is completed, for it is not possible to insert additional details once the list is typed. Thus this work can only be undertaken in the last four days or so prior to polling day.

Secondly, how many constituencies could secure the required number of typists and typewriters to carry out this work in such a short period? It must be kept in mind that we are thinking of a system to be applied generally in the constituencies.

The typing of the lists of 'Labour Promises' in the average constituency will necessitate 140 to 160 typing hours. If an agent fails to secure the completion of his lists, his system is brought to nought, and he would hastily have to improvise with something else.

I dislike any system that necessitates

this rush in the closing stages of the campaign. It may be argued that with a continuous canvass for the marked register these lists could be started immediately the election is announced—this is rather unrealistic and ignores last stage canvass results and possible removals.

Even Reading with its excellent system for a continuous canvass for the marked register apparently only undertook typing of the 8-fold sheets in the last four days of the election campaign.

★ ★ ★

**'STYM' SYSTEM.** The advantages of this system are that there is no need for preparation of any records for polling day, other than the actual canvass results being clearly marked on the canvass register card, and only one marking-off operation is required on polling day.

The big disadvantage is that when a card is out for 'knocking-up', the numbers of promises relative to that card, who have polled, must be literally written down on the coloured backing card. When the majority of cards are out on 'knocking-up' then this becomes a rather messy and far from speedy operation. In addition, the actual canvass records are sent out of the committee room with the knockers-up.

We have experimented with duplicate 'Stym' cards to get over this difficulty; that is to prepare two cards with identical records which are placed side by side in the envelope pocket. The snag, however, is that unless there is complete accuracy in pasting on the register pages there will be confusion—even only slight mis-alignment will upset things.

★ ★ ★

**'THE CLARKE' SYSTEM.** This was outlined in last month's issue. It has many of the advantages of the Reading system, but has the very strong additional point that the list and charts are hand-written, thus the major problem of typists and typewriters are surmounted.

Once again the obvious disadvantage is that completion of the lists must await until a few days before polling day, for,

s with the Reading system, additional promises' cannot be later inserted.

★      ★      ★

**'INDIVIDUAL PROMISE CARDS'.**  
This system, although necessitating writing-up of special cards for the promises, need not await the conclusion of the canvass. This work can be started at any time—additional promises can easily be inserted by merely writing an additional card.

If constituencies proceed in compiling a marked register between elections, then the writing of these cards will be a continuous process; thus the major part of the writing will be completed before an election campaign opens. In fact, it is not only a polling day system, but the record for planning in between election work.

The pulling-out of the appropriate card of a Labour promise who has polled is a speedy operation. The workers knocking-up only take out cards of Labour promises who have not voted; they are not cluttered with any other information.

What are the defects? It is essential to keep a master record on a numbered marking-off chart — without this the promise cards cannot be brought up-to-date when they are returned from a knocking-up tour.

The other criticism is that there is usually a number of cards for one house; against this, however, there is the advantage that the cards are easily dropped into one's pocket in the event of bad weather.

It may be argued that a household promise card is easier for the 'knockers-

up' to handle. This may be so, but the operation of marking-off the promises who have voted is considerably slowed up and becomes very messy. (Having operated this household card system once, I say never again!)

There are many variations on these systems, but these have few basic differences.

Every system I have come across appears to have a defect at one stage. The advantages achieved in some directions are offset by grave disadvantages in other aspects.

These, I believe, are the three main essentials in polling day systems:

- (a) Records that can be prepared without waiting for the last few days of the campaign, and which can be carried out continuously as the canvass proceeds.
- (b) Avoidance of too many operations in the committee room, with consequent economy of man-power.
- (c) Speedy recording of which Labour promises have voted and which enables the knocking-up record to be also speedily brought up-to-date.
- (d) Knocking-up records which are easy to handle on the job.

I have clearly shown that we have not yet found the system that has all the advantages without grave defects, and which can readily be put into operation by the great majority of our constituency parties.

The debate on the merits of rival systems will undoubtedly continue.

To the  
Editor

## Overseas Membership

SIR,—I notice that the Statement of Receipts and Payments in the Annual Report shows that only £14 16s. od. has been paid in respect of members who have taken up temporary residence abroad.

With the Overseas Membership subscription at £1 1s. od. this means that no more than 14 members have continued, or have been made aware, that they may continue their membership while abroad.

Britons going overseas to-day have a great responsibility to our movement: often it is by their behaviour that we are judged. In the Labour Party to-day there must be many members of the professions

whose business takes them away for long periods. By no means all of them are aware that they can remain a member and at the same time receive all the official party publications (not the higher-priced books, of course), for an inclusive fee of one guinea.

Secretaries and agents can make an important contribution towards good propaganda for our Socialism overseas if they ensure that this facility is known to members who are contemplating a sojourn abroad.

Yours, etc.,  
ELLIS H. WILSON.

# SEEKING OUT THE WORKERS

READING 'Quair's' report of the ward that would not wake up, in last month's *Organiser*, I was struck with the similarity of this situation to one which I had to face some years ago, as a fairly new agent.

So I write this account in the hope that it may be of interest, not only to 'Quair', but to all who have on their hands dormant wards and local parties which stubbornly refuse to be revived.

Like 'Quair' we had a ward with a goodly number of members (130) who fairly regularly paid their contributions. Membership collectors were reasonably active, but nobody else was. The Secretary hung on to office and occasionally called a meeting—which no one ever attended—but did nothing else. There were one or two other officers who were officers in name only.

In the whole ward, it seemed as if there was no one who cared sufficiently about the Labour Party to take any interest at all in its welfare. And yet, a few short years before, this ward had been one of the most progressive in the borough, taking a full share in all activities, running its own bazaar, and even—in 1946—snatching a borough council seat from the discomfited local Tories.

A combination of unhappy circumstances had put an end to this proud tale of progress, and now, here I was, faced with the task of reviving an almost completely moribund ward organisation.

Enquiry as to past endeavours brought little comfort. It seemed that an outstandingly efficient borough party secretary had tried all the usual methods—

letters to members, personal calls, etc., rounded off by an urgent summons to a ward meeting—without any result at all.

Another try seemed to be the only thing possible, so I carefully composed a special letter, made sure it was distributed to all known past and present members, personally visited everyone who might conceivably be thought likely to do any work and hopefully called a special meeting. Three people turned up; the secretary, the vice-chairman, who came too

by Jim Lyons

resign his office, and an elderly gentleman who was almost totally deaf.

On the way home from that meeting the borough party secretary put my thoughts into words. "Looks like we've had it, Jim," he said. "Between us we've tried everyone in that ward and got nowhere."

I was forced to agree, but, turning the problem over in my mind later that evening, I suddenly asked myself—*had* we tried everyone? Everyone *in* the Party?—yes. But what about those supporters *outside* the Party? What about the Labour voters?

And it struck me then, as it has done many times since, that when we go in search of active workers, we almost invariably confine our operations to the charmed circle of Party members. We assume all too readily that if Labour voters and supporters were sufficiently interested, they would have already come forward to offer their services.

We rarely stop to think that the reason many Labour voters have not offered to help with Party work, may quite well be *because they have never been asked*.

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed as if I'd got hold of something worth trying; so I promptly resolved to try the effect of a personal appeal for active help to every known Labour voter in the ward.

This, I soon found, was going to be a sizeable job. The records of the 1950 General Election, which had luckily been preserved, showed that out of an electorate of slightly under 4,000, there were rather more than 1,100 Labour promises. This meant that about 700 calls had to be made.

An appeal to the general committee of the borough party, outlining the plan of

campaign, produced some enthusiasm, and the necessary volunteers.

A week was set apart for the canvass, and the job was got under-way. First, lists were prepared from the canvass cards, of all known Labour voters in the ward. Then a carefully drawn-up personal letter was duplicated and delivered during the week-end before the canvass.

This set out the need for Party workers, asked the recipients to consider joining the Party and taking on one of the jobs outlined, and informed them that a member would call for their answer within seven days.

And so, all the preliminaries having been completed, came the murky November evening when seven stalwarts turned out to canvass for active workers. There was considerable speculation at the outset as to what our reception would be, for none of us had done anything quite like this before.

By the time the last canvasser came in with his report, all doubts were set at rest. In the course of rather less than 150 calls, we had secured volunteers for the offices of treasurer, chairman and membership secretary, in addition to three collectors.

Before the week was out, we knew beyond doubt that we had more than enough nominations to fill all the posts we needed—including two volunteers for secretary, both under 25!

Almost as a by-product, we had secured—without really trying—more than 30 new members, and as we now had more than enough collectors to look after them, they were made very welcome.

All who had volunteered to help were invited to a special ward meeting within three days of the completion of the canvass, and 18 out of 22 turned up.

At that meeting, new officers and committee were elected, collectors appointed; a programme of activity drawn up, and for the first time in years, the ward got well and truly on its feet. Of course, the newcomers to office were mostly inexperienced, and had to be given a good deal of guidance and tuition, but they were willing, and that is all that really matters.

Of course, some of them fell by the wayside within a few months; but by that time those who stuck had got the hang of the job, and steered the ward safely through each minor crisis that arose.

Inside six months, all ward activities were re-established, membership was

doubled, and when the time came to fight the first borough council election held in the ward for three years, the Tory majority was reduced from over 700 to 64.

Well, there you are, Comrade 'Quair', that's how we stirred interest in our Party to life in one almost hopeless ward. Since then we have done the same thing on three different occasions and it's worked each time.

As a result of our experience we have now evolved a technique for finding active workers which we are beginning to apply to strengthen local party and ward organisations, to *prevent* them collapsing. And soon we hope to use this method to find election workers in good time for next May—especially canvassers!

I am not pretending any of this is easy. To be successful, an active worker canvass requires careful preparation, good timing, close co-ordination and a very considerable amount of 'doorstep work'.

But if it be true—and who will deny it?—that the whole structure of our organisation rests upon our voluntary active workers, then it must be equally true that any effort that swells their numbers is abundantly worth while.

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**DAILY HERALD**  
*Circulates Labour's Case*

IN my last article I argued that the principal purposes of our electioneering effort, particularly in marginal constituencies, are (i) to identify and (ii) to muster all those electors who, if they vote at all, will vote Labour.

I start the consideration of these tasks from two basic principles. The first is that the identification of our voters must be a *continuous* process and not carried out only during an election campaign; and the second is that a marked register is insufficient for the purpose. Let us look at these two basic principles in some detail.

### Five Reasons

There are five reasons why the identification of Labour voters must be a continuous process. Here they are:

(i) The sum total of work is far less if it is done continuously than if it is done intermittently when election campaigns (local government or parliamentary) crop up. The reason for that is simple: it is that, if you canvass for identification only at election time, and then lose or destroy records of that canvass (or retain them in a form in which they are not easily usable again), and then start from scratch in the next election campaign, you unnecessarily repeat each time that part of the work which covers convinced, unchangeable supporters and convinced, unchangeable opponents, who between them represent a considerable part of the electorate and hence a considerable part of the work.

By contrast, if you do the work continuously and build up a permanent record, the task on special occasions, including election campaigns, is merely to check and to bring up-to-date—obviously a smaller piece of work than the task of doing the whole job from scratch, and one which ensures that you don't waste the benefit of previous canvasses.

In this respect, as in some others, we can learn a lot, if we are not too proud or hidebound to do so, from the methods used by companies which conduct con-

# EFFICIENT CONTINUOUS

Ian Mikardo, M.P., urges that  
compiling records of Labour  
firms engaged in door-to-door  
this further article on Reading

tinuous and organised door-to-door selling campaigns. It's true that their problems aren't identical with ours, but there are some close similarities.

Their canvassers have to do a lot of footslogging; they often meet caution, resistance and hostility, when the door is opened, very similar to those we meet ourselves; they have to be adept at extracting information without giving offence; and they have to cope with 'outs' and removals. Some of these firms have devoted a lot of thought and highly-skilled manpower to finding the answers to these problems, and we shouldn't be ashamed to cash in on their discoveries.

Suppose a vacuum-cleaner company organised a sales drive in Reading by canvassing every house. Every salesman would be required to put in, on a form, a detailed report on every call he has made. Those reports would be put in a permanent form, probably on a card-index, and that permanent record would be a very valuable part of the sales department's stock-in-trade.

### Repeat Canvass

If the company wants to do a repeat or follow-up campaign in Reading a year later, they certainly won't again send out their salesmen 'cold-canvassing', as they call it, i.e., starting from scratch. Instead, the salesman in each district will be given the index-cards compiled after the last canvass, and will study each of them before he calls on the house to which it refers. Thus he will know that it's no use

# ANVASS A S PROCESS

tion of business methods in  
rs. We can learn a lot from  
of their products he claims in  
successful election campaign.

calling in Fox Street because they've got no electricity there and aren't getting it laid on till 1957.

He will know that when he calls on Mr. Brown of 7 Goose Street that she is a good prospect because her vacuum cleaner is old and was under repair when the last salesman called in 1954. He will know that Mrs. Smith of number 9 is an old lady who is terrified of electrical gadgets, and so he'd better start by telling her how safe his appliance is.

## Go Careful

He will know that he had better go careful at number 11 because the last salesman had the door slammed in his face—and so on.

Of course, his 1954 index-cards will be wrong in some respects. Some people will have removed, and others will have changed their circumstances or their views about vacuum cleaners. But it's a minor job to catch up with those changes, and nine times out of ten his index-card will make his canvass, and the job of recording it, far less difficult than it would otherwise be.

Like these salesmen, we can save a lot of sweat if we aim to start each canvass not at the point at which we started the previous one but at the point at which we left off the previous one.

(ii) Every Constituency Labour Party has difficulty in getting enough people to canvass, largely because so many people are scared of being embarrassed or humiliated by clever or ill-mannered

opponents. It's a good plan to start them on the softer end of the job, i.e., the canvassing of Labour supporters, and one can often persuade a party member to do that even when he's unwilling to do a straight-through canvass.

But you can't, of course, separate out the Labour supporters from the Tories and the doubtfuls unless you've got a permanent record, i.e., one which is in existence before the campaign canvassing starts.

## Saves Time

(iii) A continuous canvass record not only reduces, as I've shown above, the total amount of canvassing to be done: what is equally important is that it saves time and effort during the period when time and effort are precious, i.e., during the election campaign. With all the other things that have got to be done, there just isn't time in those three weeks to do a proper canvass.

(iv) In particular there isn't time in the campaign to go back over all the 'outs', especially the persistent 'outs'.

(v) Some people are chary about disclosing their political allegiance at any time, but many of them are most chary about it during an election campaign.

People are slightly less inclined to adopt a 'won't tell' attitude when they're not facing the test of action. And since, as I shall show later, it is most important to reduce the number of 'don't-knows' to the irreducible minimum, the heightened disinclination of people to state their views at election time makes canvassing during the campaign less valuable than at other times.

*Why not a marked register?* For all these five reasons, therefore, I consider that the identification and recording of supporters is a process which must go on all the time. I turn now to my second basic principle, which is that a marked register is not adequate as the permanent record, and I say this for the following four reasons:

(i) A register can't be the basis of a permanent record because it lives for only one year. The consequence is that when the new register comes out you have the job of transferring not merely the information about changes since the last register but the information about the

(Continued on page 228)

# Leaders Came from Leeds

LIKE others of its kind, the City of Leeds Labour Party was formed under the new constitution of 1918, but long before then there had been Labour and Socialist activities in the city.

We know that as far back as 1874 a Labour candidate fought in a municipal election, though we are without information about this pioneer. Twenty years later Labour candidates were more plentiful and their election meetings were often riotous, with the usual accompaniments of blood, black eyes, and broken furniture: "Them Was Days!"

## GAINED CONTROL

The year 1928 is historic in the record of Leeds Labour, for it was then that the party first gained control of the Leeds City Council, with the slender majority of four, which disappeared two years later when there was a redistribution of wards.

Three years later Labour was again in power for two years; and those two years are as historic in the social history of England as they are in the local history of this city, for it was then that Leeds became world-famous for its revolutionary housing policy.

The architect of that policy was the late Alderman the Rev. Charles Jenkinson, Chairman of the Housing Committee, and a veritable Pillar of Fire.

The extensive slum clearance programme and the policy of differential rent relief roused the local press and landlords to fury. There was a virulent and unceasing 'Red Ruin' campaign and in 1935 the Tories, helped by people in the slums and housing estates, were back in control.

During the war there were no 'Politics', but in 1945 Labour once more gained control with a substantial majority. How-

ever, another redistribution of wards in 1951 put back the Tories: redistributions do not appear to be healthy for Labour!

Two years later Labour regained power and is now in control with 17 Labour as against 11 Tory aldermen and 51 Labour as against 33 Tory councillors. In a City Council of 112 Labour has a majority of 24.

The City of Leeds Labour Party, of which Len. Williams, as well as Reg. Wallis, was once secretary, and which is now in the care of the vigilant and forthright Walter Preston, is a lively body of delegates drawn from nearly 200 trade union branches, 28 wards, 6 constituency parties, women's sections, League of Youth and a few other affiliated societies.

Such a body is bound to represent the various shades of opinion within the party, and Leeds has had its fair share of temperature-raising controversies. Like other party organisations it, heard all about German rearmament: it is never left in ignorance about the rights and wrongs of the natives of Timbuktu; and even of the natives of this island.

If descriptions like Right and Left are to be used (and if we deplore them we can take consolation from the knowledge that they have not been imported from America) I think that it would be correct to say that Leeds is fairly evenly divided, with a bias to the Right when matters come to a head.

## WEEKLY PAPER

Leeds Labour has one distinction in relation to other party organisations; the *Leeds Weekly Citizen* which, I am told, is the only local Labour weekly in the country. It was started in 1911 by a group of Labour people and organisations, and some years ago the majority of the shares became the property of the party.

The directors, appointed by the party executive, appoint the editor with the understanding that within the framework of general support of national party

policy he has the right of criticism and disagreement in particulars.

The *Citizen* is a voluntary paper, neither editor nor contributors receiving any payment or expenses of any kind. It is well known outside Leeds and many M.P.s have wished that they had such a weekly in their constituencies.

#### **NOW PROFESSOR**

Len. Williams was its editor for some years when secretary of the Leeds Party. His successor was also transferred to more distinguished work as Professor of English in the University of Liverpool. If Kenneth Muir's language was more academic than that of Len's it was definitely not as colourful!

Leeds has six Parliamentary constituencies, four of which are represented by Labour members with good majorities: Alice Bacon (12,572), Hugh Gaitskell (12,016), Charles Pannell (6,264), and Denis Healey (4,939)—very comfortable figures. As for the members themselves—well, with all due respect to other cities, outside London, ———!

It is within a few months of half a century since Leeds elected its first Labour M.P., James O'Grady, later Sir James O'Grady, Governor of Tasmania. Leeds air must be good for its M.P.s, and even candidates. Henry Slessor became Sir Henry and Solicitor-General in one of Ramsay MacDonald's governments, and then a Lord Justice of Appeal.

Jim Milner—a local lad—became Deputy Speaker of the House and is now in the Lords. Hugh Gaitskell needs no further mention. Alice Bacon, whom we

count as 'one of us' because she lives on our doorstep, has made a national reputation; Denis Healey an international one; and Charles Pannell, secretary of the Trade Union Group in the House and an eminent member of the A.E.U., has a distinction of his own.

I wonder whether our 'adoptees' on coming to Leeds as candidates ever repeated from *Macbeth*—"The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses . . . Heaven's breath smells wooingly here".

Leeds has also sent out to other places and services many of its children, both native and adopted. Three party chairmen have come from here: Arthur Greenwood, Alderman Alf. Dobbs, and Alice Bacon. Arthur Greenwood was also party treasurer, as is Hugh Gaitskell. John Edwards, M.P., Privy Councillor, and a former Junior Minister, graduated at Leeds University, as well as in the Leeds City Council. Others could be mentioned.

#### **W.E.A. PRESIDENT**

Harold Clay, President of the W.E.A., became chairman of the London Labour Party; John Cliff became chairman of the London County Council; Andrew Conley and Dame Anne Loughlin both became chairmen of the T.U.C., and don't forget that Len Williams and Sara Barker both worked here and from here for years.

This is enough to be going on with; but no wonder that Leeds is a mature party with traditions, experience, and examples set by so many of its eminent children, native and adopted.

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## **Stevenage 80% Labour**

**by B. M. Chesterton**

**T**HIS term the Cambridge University Labour Club decided to form canvassing parties during the term; the first one went to Stevenage.

Stevenage is very fertile ground, consisting as it does almost entirely of housing estates and having a very keen, energetic agent with some first-class voluntary workers who already go canvassing every Sunday morning in the new town. The people here are 80 per cent Labour. There is some discontent in the

local factories and, with the present lack of amenities, after some nine months immersed in their new houses, they want something to do.

Unfailing co-operation was given by the local party to the people who went on the first campaign.

The team split up into pairs. One pair canvassed known supporters only, calling on people who had been in the houses about six months and who had been given literature about the local Labour Party the previous day. They gained 55 members on the Friday night and 59 on the

Saturday morning, working a total of four and a half hours each.

The other pair canvassed all houses indiscriminately where no literature had been given out. This pair obtained 53 members altogether, working a total of six hours each.

The tremendous disparity between these two results, allowing for the different personalities and other advantages of the first pair, was due, in the opinion of the team and of the agent, to the literature distribution.

For example, a woman would say, "I have talked it over with my husband and we have decided to join", instead of "I shall have to talk it over with my husband" when she had had no literature. The literature is most important as it removes the initial shock caused by canvassers at the door and also saves a lot of the canvasser's time.

Due to the tremendously rich field open in Stevenage, practically no following up of 'possibles' is done, but by intensive canvassing members can be made in from 40 per cent to 60 per cent of the houses.

There are already 1,600 members in the town itself.

Many local parties cannot hope to do as well as this, of course, but if literature is distributed beforehand and regular canvassing campaigns undertaken, if possible calling only on known supporters and following-up systematically, membership in many cases easily could be doubled.

The inspiration afforded by a rising membership would give everyone in the party new spirit and the disillusioned would become keen again. Also, the common bogey of party agents, the fear of overloading collectors, is destroyed. Collectors are normally found in the proportion one to fifteen members if they are looked for hard enough.

Finally, though the facts in this article refer mainly to Stevenage, the conclusions drawn from them are borne out by members' experiences in vacation campaigns in all parts of the country, from small farming villages in East Anglia to the great urban conglomerations of the North. Stevenage should prove an inspiration and an example to them all.

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## SWINDON'S SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

**THE** individual membership in the Swindon constituency doubled in 1952, and showed a further rise in 1953. There was a slight drop in 1954 and when the executive committee reviewed the membership figures in September, 1955, it was clear that membership was still declining.

The executive decided to convene a meeting of ward officers and key workers to have a thorough examination of the membership position. The meeting was held on the 27th September. It was agreed to organise a drive for new members and to concentrate the effort on the North Ward.

There is a large council estate in this ward and building is still in progress. For purposes of Party organisation the ward is divided into three sections, and when the ward officers met again at the end of October to report progress the following results were revealed:

**Penhill Section.** Four hundred new members enrolled, bringing the membership in that section of the ward to

approximately 800. Fourteen members had assisted in the canvass.

**Gorse Hill Section.** Eighty new members enrolled, bringing the membership to 280. Six members assisted in the canvass.

**Pinehurst Section.** One hundred and eighty new members, bringing the membership to 260. Ten members helped in the canvass.

The total number of new members enrolled in just over three weeks of canvassing was 660, almost doubling the previous membership in the ward.

It is one thing to enrol new members; it is another problem to maintain contact, to collect contributions regularly, and to make the maximum use of the members in the day-to-day work of the Party.

Our colleagues in Swindon are to be congratulated on their success in the membership drive and if they tackle the problem of maintaining and making full use of the new members with the same vigour as they organised and carried out the canvass we can be sure that they will succeed.

**J. EMRYS JONES**

# Progress is Made on Wilson Report

THE popular Press has had a grand old time with the report of the Labour Party's National Executive sub-committee on Party organisation.

Since the report was published there have been stories of plot and counter-plot, and the whole business has been made to appear like a story of court intrigue in a Ruritarian state.

The papers must have sensations to maintain their mass circulations, but there is little that is sensational or romantic in the tale of Labour Party organisation. Another cause of the distortion to which news about the Labour Party is so frequently subjected is the ignorance among many journalists about the democratic methods by which the party does its business.

The Labour Party had suffered losses in three successive General Elections, that of 1950 being the most serious defeat of them all. What was more natural than that at its first meeting after the May election the National Executive should wish to find what was wrong with the Party machine, and should appoint a sub-committee to enquire into the problem?

The decision to appoint the sub-committee was unanimous and was universally welcomed by Party workers. Those appointed represented the various sections of the National Executive, the trade unions, the constituency organisations, the women members and the Co-operative movement.

The sub-committee started work immediately and was able to present a formidable document of some 47 closely printed pages for the consideration of the National Executive. With a minimum of delay the National Executive met in special session to receive the report.

## Report Printed

It decided that the report should be printed and that a private session of the pending Annual Conference should be devoted to it. The National Executive was mindful of the fact that many of the recommendations involved constitutional changes, which could not be made until the following year, and that others meant the expenditure of money on a scale which

made an increase in affiliation fees inevitable.

Conference did not make any decisions, but note was taken of the opinions expressed by the delegates. While still at Margate, the National Executive appointed another sub-committee to review its own methods of work.

One of the recommendations of this sub-committee, adopted at the next National Executive meeting, was that the Organisation sub-committee should be reduced in size and should elect its own chairman, which was in line with proposals of the Wilson report. Also, it proposed a consultation between the principal Party officers and the members of the Wilson sub-committee.

This consultation resulted in a unanimous report on the recommendations to the Organisation sub-committee, but bearing in mind the recommendation about consultation with the staff in the field, the Organisation sub-committee joined with the Regional and Women's organisers in a two-day conference before reporting its views on the recommendations of the Wilson report to the National Executive.

At its meeting on the 24th November, the National Executive adopted the report of the Organisation sub-committee. Decisions were not taken on all the recommendations (some of these require detailed study and further consultation), but those which were decided are far-reaching enough.

The most important was the decision to make available £50,000 a year for organising assistance to constituencies. The Regional organisers are now busy drawing up schemes for applying the recommendations to their regions and when these have had National Executive approval, they will come into operation at once.

The circumstances of the regions vary considerably, and the Regional organisers will have different ideas about how best to use the resources to be made available and it will be necessary to mould their proposals into a national plan, but the plan should be in part operation next year and in full operation in 1957.

The penny-farthing is a machine that can move with speed once the necessary power is put behind it!

# Efficient Canvass

—CONTINUED—

people who haven't changed. That's a great waste.

(ii) The most important of these four reasons is that you can't get on a marked register, even if you paste it on paper or boards which provide you with an 'extension' at the end of each line, all the information you need about the elector.

(iii) In particular, it is difficult (though not impossible) to extract from the ordinary marked register sub-totals and totals of fors, againsts and doubtfuls.

(iv) It is impossible to record clearly any changes which take place as a result of re-canvass, e.g., if an elector listed as doubtful is found on re-canvass to be for, or one listed against is found to be doubtful.

## Card Index

It was these considerations which led us in Reading to adopt a card-index system. I shall not describe it here, since it has already been fully described in the pages of the *Labour Organiser* by R. W. G. Mackay, who was the 'father' of this system. I merely report shortly that under this system we have all our electors in a card-index—supporters on white cards, opponents on blue, and doubtfuls on buff.

No set of records remains useful for very long unless it is kept up-to-date. The card-index system is kept up-to-date by four different efforts made at four different times.

*The new register.* The first of these is the correction of the index when a new register comes out. The cards of electors who have been dropped off the register in any street must be removed, and the cards of newly-qualified electors must be inserted.

Originally this job was done separately in each area by the area manager. He would remove the cards of the people on the 'ex' list and insert buff cards for all the electors on the newly-qualified list. Then he, or his co-workers, call on those buff cards and try to identify them as being blue or white. In any case where

he succeeds the card is altered accordingly.

(Some area managers have short-circuited this procedure by making the first canvass on new arrivals direct from the electoral list and making out appropriate cards only after the canvass.)

But this procedure is wasteful, because it violates the principle of trying to record information in such a form that we shan't need to go and get the same information again.

## One Case

Take the case of Frederick George Whittaker and Elizabeth Mary Ann Whittaker who live at 18 Chester Street in polling area number 3. They are on a white card, which records that Mr. Whittaker has a car and Mrs. Whittaker is a typist and has her own machine—both valuable pieces of information. They move out of 18 Chester Street and therefore appear on the 'ex' list for polling area number 3.

The manager of that area takes their card out of the Chester Street book, and if, not knowing where they've moved to, he destroys that card he's throwing away some of our precious stock-in-trade. The Whittakers move to 27 Pitt Street in area 22, and the area manager there finds them on his newly-qualified list, and makes out a buff card for them, and calls on them, and has to start all over again discovering and recording information (and he may not succeed in discovering it) which we've already had on our records.

## Done Centrally

It is much better, therefore, to do this job centrally. Each area manager removes his 'ex' cards from his books and sends them to the constituency party office, where all of them, from all the areas put together, are put into strict alphabetical order in a single index-drawer. Then somebody goes through all the newly-registered lists, and as he comes to each name he looks through the alphabetical list to see if there's a card there for that elector.

If there is (as is generally the case) he takes this card out, deletes the old address, writes in the new address and the area number, and puts it in a pile for that area number. Then all the piles are distributed to their respective areas.

Take the case of the example quoted

above. When the clerk is going through the newly-qualified list for polling area 22, he comes to Pitt Street and then to number 27, where he finds entered Frederick George Whittaker and Elizabeth Mary Ann Whittaker. He looks in the index and finds their card, which has been sent in from area 3 under the address of 18 Chester Street. He crosses out '18 Chester Street' and inserts '27 Pitt Street, area 22'.

When the job is completed, he sends the card, together with all the others in the area 22 pile, to the manager of area 22. The area manager will then cross the Whittakers off his newly-qualified list and insert their card in the proper place in the Pitt Street book. (Of course, there may be a quite different couple, with identical surnames and forenames, but that's such an outside chance that it's not worth bothering about.)

### Come In

When he has finished this process, the only undeleted names he has got left on his newly-qualified list are those who have come from outside the constituency—and in our case they are always a small proportion of the total. He then makes out fresh buff cards for this small number of people, and calls on them.

Thus, the greater part of his canvassing of new arrivals has been done for him in advance without his having to walk a step.

This procedure may sound a bit lengthy and involved, but in fact it's quicker and simpler to do than to describe. And it gives us the information we want whilst, at the same time, reducing the volume of canvassing that has to be done—and that's always valuable.

*'Y' voters.* The second of the four steps in keeping the register up-to-date is to catch up with the 'Y' voters. It is only when they qualify that 'Y' voters are canvassed to see whether they can be put on white or blue cards. A few days before the qualifying date each 'Y' voter should receive a letter from the M.P. or candidate; and immediately after the qualifying date he gets a call from the area manager or somebody sent by the area manager, preferably a Youth Leaguer or somebody in that age group.

*Doubtfuls.* The third stage in keeping the register up-to-date is the only one which takes place during the election campaign. It is a concentrated effort to

reduce the buff cards by identifying as many as possible of them as being supporters or opponents.

The canvassing of doubtfuls is the most difficult of all types of canvassing, and it requires skilled and well-informed people to do it, though they are, of course, helped in many cases by the information entered on the cards. In our Reading campaign we had about a dozen people, all trained for the job, on this work.

### Other Chores

Some of them, like the candidate and his wife, were on it almost full-time. Others could devote less time. But we tried, with considerable success, to ensure that these dozen people (of whom some were area managers and others had jobs in the central committee rooms) did all their other chores at times unsuitable for canvassing (2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and after 9 p.m. and at week-ends), and devoted every available canvassing hour to buff-card canvassing.

By this means we succeeded, during the campaign, in reducing the number of buff cards by over two-thirds, and every buff card converted to white was one more for our knocking-up lists.

*Checking Labour supporters.* The fourth and last means of keeping the index up-to-date is canvassing *after* the election those people on white cards who, according to the polling day committee room records, did not vote. It may sound a bit of a fag to do a canvass after the work is over and the score is on the board, but it isn't a big canvass (in our case about a thousand houses after a parliamentary election, though much more after a local election), and it's a canvass of the most vital section of the electorate, i.e., Labour promises who didn't keep their promises.

### Three Things

It achieves three things: (i) it identifies some waverers, who may then go on to buff cards and thus become the subject of special attention; (ii) it discovers quite a lot of people who didn't vote because they were ill or were working out of town, i.e., potential postal voters whom you had previously missed; and (iii) it simulates, especially in local authority elections, a higher poll next time.

The method is as follows. After polling day the cards are gone through

against the marked knocking-up lists (which I described in the *Labour Organiser* for October), and a cross or circle or other symbol (indicating, e.g., "did not vote, May, 1956") is put on the card of every elector who is shown as not having voted. They are then called on, and the canvasser opens up as though it were an ordinary canvass.

Generally, sooner or later, the elector says, "I'm Labour," and sometimes adds, "You know that" or "You ought to know that". The canvasser replies, "Yes, and that's why we are so sorry to see you didn't vote last Thursday."

### Can't Offend

At this stage the elector sometimes protests that he *did* vote last Thursday, and in this case we've got to take his word for it, partly because we can't offend him and partly because we know that our polling day marking-off isn't 100 per cent watertight. But whether he's telling the truth or not, no harm has been done by the call.

In most other cases the elector begins by being curious about how you know he didn't vote, and then makes his explanation. (Believe it or not, they don't tell you to mind your own business.)

Quite a lot of them express regret for not having voted, and you urge them not to forget next time. That does a lot of good, especially for local government elections. It has also confirmed (or in a few cases has denounced) the validity of our record of the elector as a Labour supporter. (You can also pick up some new members in this canvass.)

Those, then, are the four efforts devoted to the purpose of keeping the card-index up-to-date. The canvassing of white cards *during* the election campaign is not a significant part of the process of identifying supporters. It has quite different purposes.

This system demands, of course, more organisational work and more writing than any other method. But it still gains handsomely on balance, because it reduces drastically the total amount of canvassing which is required. That will be welcomed by most agents and their workers as an undiluted blessing.

**IAN MIKARDO**

# TRAIN ELECTION

PERHAPS the most important feature arising from the General Election, and the subsequent reports on our electoral organisation, is the widespread appreciation of the fact that far more time and attention must be given to educating the Party on what is required to be done at elections.

The lack of workers, and the failure to meet many of the requirements of the General Election last May, indicates that the need for instruction is at all levels of our Party structure. It is obvious, therefore, that if we are to be successful in our efforts to improve the efficiency of the Party, a realistic approach is necessary.

First is the need to start instruction at the level at which we expect the work to be done. Second is the need to show how necessary it is to integrate electoral preparation with the day-to-day activities of the Party.

Both of these requirements are met at ward level. The ward meeting, so often the butt of organisational wise-cracks, provides the answer. The ward meeting must be made to mean something. Its real status should be appreciated so that members do attend because, as a result of their attending, something is done.

It must be admitted that many of our present ward meetings are badly attended and the meetings deadly dull, and the effect of this upon the hard-working secretary can be gauged by the number that resign or retire at the end of the year.

★

Talks on the various aspects of electoral organisation, and how to put them into operation locally, can provide the answer if given in an interesting as well as practical manner. People like to discuss and consider problems related to their own neighbourhood — it means something to them.

Let the business to be considered at ward meetings be confined so as to allow for these electoral talks to be given, and for adequate discussion to follow. This does not mean eliminating important

# WORKERS AT WARD MEETINGS

items of business that must be transacted but streamlining them. This can result in far more efficiency in the conduct of the meeting.

It may be felt that talks are all right, but where do they get us? It is often said that someone comes along and talks about what should be done, gives a few 'pat' answers and then goes off home satisfied that he has done a good job. The audience, on its part, listens politely, asks a few questions and they go home—and nothing materialises.

★

We must not approach our electoral talks on those lines. We must relate the talk to what is really required locally and to showing that it can be done. It should not be a high-falutin' talk but a practical one. We must show those members who are reluctant to undertake any kind of responsibility that there is something that they can do quite well. The reluctance usually arises from the fact that they know little or nothing of what is required or how it can be done.

Take canvassing, for instance. This is essential if we are to create an efficient electoral organisation. Most members shun the job because they conjure up in their minds all sorts of difficult situations. The fear is sometimes deepened rather than allayed by some who talk on what is to be done.

If canvassing can be shown as a means whereby we not only gather information that can be used to advantage at elections, but that, as socialists, we should get to know the people in our neighbourhood—to understand their hopes, fears, and difficulties—and by doing so serve the real purpose of our Party, then canvassing becomes something more than mechanics.

If it can be made clear that members are not expected to be political encyclopaedias, and that the average elector is not a dragon, the main fear can be allayed. This can be done most effectively by introducing into the talk a demonstration on how a call on an elector should be made and illustrating some of the questions likely to be asked. Make members realise that electors are people just like themselves, people who respond

readily to politeness. In the majority of cases the political views of the elector are definite and there is no reluctance to divulge them.

In most wards there are members who have some experience in canvassing. These should be approached to take the lead and the others can be more readily encouraged to link up with them. It is an added encouragement when it can be understood that the area to be canvassed will be one similar to their own—where the people have common problems and interests.

Take another important talk—the postal vote. The immediate thought that arises is—now for rules and regulations! While it is true that there must be an explanation of the provisions of the postal vote, it does not mean that they cannot be made interesting. For instance, after explaining the various facilities how much more interesting and alive it becomes if the occupations of the audience are used as a test, or a removal problem illustrated either on a blackboard or by prepared chart.

Simple demonstrations and tests can be applied to all of these electoral subjects and by introducing them into talks one can do much to stimulate the interest of members. Quite often a simple illustration does far more to convey what is required than the spoken word could hope to do.

Isn't this worth trying out at your ward meeting?

**Len Sims**

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**T**HE National Executive Committee has recently approved the following appointments:

**MR. J. S. KEYS** as Secretary/Agent for **Woolwich East**. Mr. Keys has been full-time agent for Woolwich West since 1950 and has now been appointed Secretary of Woolwich Borough and Agent for Woolwich East. He is 41.

**MR. C. BURROWS** — as Secretary/Agent for **Wood Green**. Mr. Burrows, who is 34, has been full-time agent at Bromsgrove for the past five years.

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